

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 26 - 27 MAY 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(126) Program 2.1: Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance

Senator Hanson-Young asked:

Outcome 4 strategies and initiatives include “To strengthen the migration and border management capabilities of governments in the Asia-Pacific region and parts of South Asia and the Middle East.” This same objective appears under Program 4.3 (Offshore Asylum Seeker Management).

- (1) How does this objective relate, in concrete terms, to the management of asylum seekers?
- (2) Which specific countries does this concern, and with which government departments in those countries is the Australian government currently working to “strengthen migration and border management capabilities”?
- (3) What activities or programs does the government have in place or intend to commence regarding strengthening of migration management in those countries?
- (4) How is this indicator consistent with the Sri Lankan and Afghan asylum processing freeze which requires unreviewable and indefinite detention for all asylum seekers of those nationalities? Will the government now amend that policy to ensure it meets this objective?

Answer:

- (1) Strengthening the migration and border management capabilities of partner governments aids in the prevention of people smuggling and trafficking activities, whilst also providing for durable solutions for persons seeking asylum. Programs run by the Australian government provide assistance not only in ensuring the integrity of visa systems and border controls, but also with assessing refugee status, welfare of displaced populations and resettlement activities.
- (2) Through various regional forums such as the Bali Process and ASEAN and through bilateral relationships, Australia works with all countries in the Asia – Pacific, South East Asia and the Middle East region on strengthening migration and border capabilities. The Australian government works with various counterpart government agencies dependent on the responsibility of agencies within the relevant country, this could include those in the foreign affairs, justice and immigration spheres.
- (3) The Australian government provides a range of capacity building programs and activities in the region, through both regional and direct bilateral programs. These activities include a range of workshops, provision of training and exchanges covering issues such as biometrics, document examination, investigations, visa integrity and information technology and communications support. Further assistance is provided

through the support provided to international organisations, such as programs through the International Organization for Migration and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees which act to strengthen migration management through identifying durable solutions to irregular migration flows.

(4) It is the role of the UNHCR to conduct refugee status determinations for persons who raise protection claims, and take the lead in seeking support from resettlement countries to resettle those who are found to be refugees. Asylum seekers referred to Australia by the UNHCR under our offshore humanitarian program will not be subject to the recently announced suspension on processing of Sri Lankan and Afghan asylum claims.

The Australian Government will continue to support asylum seekers in neighbouring countries in order to share the burden of hosting refugees. It is expected that this will result in less people utilising the dangerous services of people smugglers in order to reach Australia while the suspension remains in place.